

OLIVER HARRIS.

[To accompany Bill H. R. No. 347.]

MARCH 19, 1860.

Mr. TAPPAN, from the Committee on Claims, made the following

REPORT.

The Committee on Claims, to whom was referred the petition of Oliver Harris, "asking relief against a balance found due by him on the books of the treasury," having had the same under consideration, beg leave to report:

That petitioner was formerly surveyor of the port of St. Louis, and while holding this office in 1843 the custom-house at New Orleans was robbed of a package of one hundred thousand dollars of redeemed treasury notes. Thomas G. Morgan, the collector of the port of New Orleans, offered a reward of one thousand dollars for the recovery of the notes and the apprehension of the guilty parties. The petitioner, ascertaining that one J. A. Watson, suspected of the robbery, was in Philadelphia, employed Silas Haight, and advanced him one hundred dollars to pursue and arrest Watson, which he succeeded in doing, and Watson, with two confederates, was convicted and sentenced to ten years imprisonment in the penitentiary. Mr. Harris took an active part in these prosecutions, and was mainly instrumental in securing arrest and conviction. Montgomery Blair, esq., then United States attorney in St. Louis, says: "I know that in the matter of pursuing the criminals, he was most efficient and active, and I have always thought was more instrumental than any one else in bringing them to justice. This I know from my own connexion with the business, being at the time United States district attorney for Missouri."

Mr. Haight testifies to the advance of one hundred dollars by petitioner to him to enable him to pursue and arrest the criminal, and also to the importance of petitioner's services as a witness in New Orleans on the trial of each of the *three* parties convicted.

The collector of customs at New Orleans testifies to having offered the reward, only one-half of which was ever paid, and that out of his own individual funds. He says that an understanding was had with Bailey Peyton, then United States district attorney at New Orleans, that petitioner should be subpoenaed in each of the three cases as a witness, in order that his witness fees might cover his expenses.

This, however, was neglected, Mr. Harris being summoned in only one case, though present during all the trials. In the meantime he had to employ an assistant in St. Louis.

On the settlement of his accounts with the government in the year 1845, Mr. Harris credited himself with one-third of the reward offered by the collector of New Orleans, amounting to \$333 33, and witness fees amounting to \$348, making in the aggregate \$681 33. Nine years afterwards, to wit, in 1854, the department disallowed these items, and suit was instituted to recover the amount. In 1855 the Secretary of the Treasury suspended the proceedings in the suit to give the petitioner an opportunity to "go before the board of claims or Congress for relief for this amount, he having no power to allow the item." As petitioner's books and papers were burned in 1849, he could not establish his demand by *legal* evidence, and he therefore appeals to Congress. Your committee think, under all the peculiar circumstances of the case, the petitioner is entitled to the relief sought, and therefore report the accompanying bill, and recommend its passage.